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NEWS *release*

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Partnership Provides Safety Net for Youth

WHITEHORSE – Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers is pleased to announce \$227,000 towards a unique partnership between Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, Blue Feather Youth Centre, the Council for Yukon First Nations and Health and Social Services to provide a safety net to prevent youth homelessness.

Under the new partnership, Health and Social Services will provide funding to Skookum Jim Friendship Centre to provide an after-hours youth outreach program for youth aged 17 to 20 years. Youth under the age of 17 will be directed to Family and Children's Services.

The program will run 12 hours daily, from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m., seven days a week and staff will assess, refer or direct youth who state they do not have a safe place to go at night to either their immediate caregiver, or to a designated safe bed.

Blue Feather will also expand its hours of operation to provide additional services and supports to youth later in evenings and on weekends.

"First, it's important that young people be provided with a safe place to stay for the night, then put in contact with appropriate services, or reconnected with their families," Cathers stated. "By utilizing these additional services, we will ensure youth will receive support when

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required."

Grand Chief Andy Carvill said it was necessary for the Council for Yukon First Nations and the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre to become partners in this endeavour. "Neither First Nations nor any of the agencies, or governments, want to lose any of our youth on the streets," Carvill said. "I believe this is a creative solution that will meet our current needs and give us some time to develop a long-term solution. This solution will also give all of us a clear understanding of the scope of this problem so that taxpayers' dollars are not allocated wastefully."

Minister Cathers indicated that this pilot project will be used to assess the extent of youth homelessness and develop effective multi-year strategies.

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